COLE BLEASE GRAHAM [CBG]: This is Tape 20, Side 1, an interview with Governor Robert E. McNair as a part of the McNair Oral History Project of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. Today's date is April 11, 1983. Governor, what was the Tricentennial Commission? Generally, how did it get started, and what was your basic role with it.

ROBERT E. McNAIR [REM]: Well, of course, the Tricentennial, being the 300th anniversary of the settlement of the British in Charleston in 1670, was something that I think originated over a period of time. We had celebrated the hundredth anniversary of the Civil War in 1965, with North Carolina and others, putting a lot of emphasis on that. We felt that we had, you know, been through that period and that, really, the history of South Carolina was more around the Revolutionary period, and we'd never focused on that. Facetiously we said let's talk about something we won rather than something we lost and try to rebuild the image and the pride of the people of South Carolina in the state. Of course, we had a very rich history with that settlement there in 1670.

Tom Lawton, my law partner from Allendale, was a history buff, and, of course, most of his interest was more in that period of the Revolution than in the Civil War. In the General Assembly, we had Bradley Morrah from up in Greenville whose mother was big in the DAR. Mrs. Morrah was one of the leaders of the Daughters of the American Revolution, nationally and otherwise. And [Joseph F.] Peter McGee, who was a member of the legislature from Charleston. I think it sort of came with a lot of Charleston influence because that was what we focused on. We talked about it and determined that we ought to have a Tricentennial Commission. When we got into establishing one is where we got into the fact that we couldn't just establish the commission and let them determine how and what we ought to do. The legislature wanted more input into it.

Our original plan was really to focus on that period, and we had talked about having a central theme park type of development, and that should be in Charleston. That's where we got into the discussions about the acquisition of what we referred to as Old Town, now Charles Towne Landing, owned by the Waring family. When we got into it, of course, we ran into the regional problems in the state. The Piedmont area wanted to be involved and the Midlands area wanted to be involved. It really took off on us and probably grew into something much bigger than any of us had envisioned in the beginning.

CBG: Yes. Was there thought of coordinating the work of this commission, as it grew, with other activities, 1ike, for example, thinking ahead to the Bicentennial or coordinating with PRT [Department of Parks, Recreation, and Tourism]?

REM: Yes, there was, and PRT, you recall, was getting started. It was just getting off the ground. We talked about putting in under PRT, really, and not having a separate commission, but I think the pressure was there to have a commission to go through that period only. That was what we started out with. We'd just have a Tricentennial Commission that would get us through 1970, and then it would go out of business. We planned for facilities and all to be under PRT so that they would then take over after that period of time, and they would own and operate any permanent-type of exhibit or theme park or whatever we had. So we pretty well had it structured where it would perpetuate itself.

CBG: Do you think getting the legislature involved maybe accelerated this idea of a center in Columbia or the Midlands?

REM: Yes, yes, it did. [Interruption]

CBG: We were talking about the different centers around the state.

REM: Yes, when we started off we set up a pretty strong commission with Tom Lawton as chairman, Tom Pope, and people like that on it. As we got along, I remember we had quite a controversy, particularly internally about other facilities, physical facilities, because we didn't want to get into all of that. To get the legislation through it finally became necessary to include Greenville and Columbia. So we would have the historic theme park in Charleston at Old Towne, and Greenville, of course, is where they got into the futuristic geodesic dome structure. That sort of took over what was supposed to be in it. Really, what was supposed to be there was a textile museum. It was going to be sort of the history of the textile industry. It had its futuristic aspect, looking to the future, and it had a lot of interest because of where it was located and the fact that there was really nothing up in that area at that time to attract tourists and tourism. Tying it around the history of the state and textiles and then having the futuristic side to it, of course, had a lot of appeal.

The one here in Columbia was one of Jennie Dreher's projects. She had headed up the Historic Columbia Foundation and the Robert Mills House and the Boyleston Gardens, and they had the Hampton-Preston House. That had a lot of appeal, and they envisioned having more there. Of course, history has said that the one in Greenville we never could construct and make work, and the one here never really got off the ground. The one in Charleston turned out to be a very successful venture and sort of what everybody wanted.

CBG: Is there an explanation for why the two additions didn't work? Do you think it would be a lack of support, maybe, from the commission?

REM: No, I really think it was more that all of them were victims of circumstance as much as anything. The one in Greenville perhaps would

have been a successful venture except for the fact that structurally it wouldn't work. This was done by the world famous Buckminster Fuller. We always referred to him as an architect, but he was not, and we found that out later. He was a design person, and it was designed by him and then reduced to the architectural drawings, and Daniel Construction couldn't put it together and make it work. It was so futuristic, is what I said (laughter) that the only thing we could do was laugh about that albatross that I had around my neck and everybody else's neck. Finally we had to abandon it and there was litigation over it, and the state was successful in the litigation. We ran into the litigation and discovered that Buckminster Fuller was not an architect and an engineer. That was his defense: "I just think. Other people draw and draft and put them together."

CBG: Yes.

REM: He got very upset and sort of indignant over the fact that he would get sued. We felt that he was responsible for it. But that one, perhaps, would have been a successful venture and might have been a good, worthwhile thing had it worked. It was in a good area, as I say. It was keyed around something. We didn't have a museum of any significance at that time, and it could have developed into a good industrial-related museum, taking industry from its early days on through and having the futuristic side of it tied into the textile industry and to the big textile center there in Greenville.

The one here was more a preservationist project from the beginning, and I don't think anybody ever really saw it as more than just another historic house and grounds that could be preserved. It should have been done by the city and the county, but Hampton-Preston had some real significance to the state, the Hampton family, and that was the one it

was necessary to include to get everything else through. You know, they tried during the period and had some very, very interesting exhibits there, and got a lot of activity there, but there was no permanency in that one. I don't think, other than just being a historic facility, that there was any thought of having any kind of park or anything that would really attract large numbers of people.

CBG: They did use two Fuller domes that were prefabs.

REM: Yes, we put the prefab domes there, and they were interesting and worked during the period.

CBG: What about other activities of the Tricentennial Commission, other than development of the three sites? Did they do support things?

REM: Well, what they did was really supported things all over the state, and it was impressive to me, the activity. You know, there were so many things I don't think we were all aware of, historic sites, historic involvements, historic regions, the settlement of areas by people from certain parts of the world, and the state really got into it which impressed me. I don't think we've ever gotten into a celebration like we did that one, like going up to Oconee County and attending something at the football stadium and having it packed, or going to Orangeburg and finding that German families settled there. Everybody got involved in it so it served a good purpose, and a lot of good things came out of it. We got the state, I think, back on the right track and the right focus by reminding us of our early history and prominence and leadership in so many areas, leadership in education and all of that, and I think it all helped get a lot of pride in the state and sort of rebuild the image of South Carolina. It was good, too, to tie back with the British.

CBG: A lot of scholarly studies, too.

REM: A lot of scholarly studies. George Rogers over at the university sort of, I think, participated and led that movement. Charles Lee with Archives and History, of course, was very instrumental in all of this from the beginning and was one of the motivating forces. You know, when you get people like Charles Lee excited about something like Old Towne and the museum up in Greenville, you know you've got people caught up in the excitement of that period. There were numerous things like historic tours over the state. All kinds of landmarks were found that we didn't know about.

CBG: An interesting development, too, was the self-directed automobile tour where you could almost retrace history at your own pace.

REM: That's the one I had reference to, taking you all along from Charleston on up through Edgefield and up in that area and all over. We tried to develop something like North Carolina's historic play which would run during the season, and we took Sesquicentennial Park and built that theatre out there and had the person who wrote *Unto These Hills*, who until that moment had never written one that was unsuccessful. Well, we got the first unsuccessful one. I think he tried to re-do, and it was too much of the same thing. It attracted a lot of people, but it didn't perpetuate itself. We had expected and hoped that that would be, you know, a thing that would continue forever and would really grow in popularity, but it didn't survive.

Something that did survive is the Colonial Cup. It was put together with Mrs. Scott and the Bostics and Mr. Guest, who had been ambassador to England and France, and all of those people. We pulled them all together and under the auspices and with the full cooperation of the Carolina Cup and started the Colonial Cup. When it was begun, it was the richest steeplechase race in the United States and attracted horses

from all over the world. That again probably wouldn't have happened and couldn't have happened under any other set of circumstances. It's become an international race and still gets a lot of international attention focused on South Carolina.

We also had numbers of things where we brought in leading political and governmental figures from all of the various countries that were related to South Carolina's early history, and we also capitalized on the industrial growth of the state by having functions and bringing in political figures from Germany to get a closer tie. The British particularly were very cooperative.

CBG: Were there direct contacts between . . .

REM: Yes. People seem to sort of jump up when you get into something like this. We had [Patrick] Paine-Williams, as he had been known to us for a number of years. He had worked for WIS television as a news director. In fact, he had always produced, as we said, the inauguration, the inaugural ceremonies, through the years for us. During all of this, he surfaced as Patrick Paine-Henderson, related to the Queen Mother's lady-in-waiting and as a result of that was extremely close to the royal family. The Queen Mother's secretary, personal secretary, who was male, was a very close friend of his, and through him and through his contacts we were able to have direct contacts with the royal family. We went over at the invitation of the Queen Mother, Josephine and I, and we took the children, the daughters, with a small group from here and visited there. I talked with her about coming over. We were quite anxious to try and get the Queen Mother to come during some of the Tricentennial celebrations. She was making a real effort to come and sent a number of people. They sent Lord Cobham who was very prominent in the British

government and was very close to the royal family. He came for the Colonial Cup. There was what they call the Keeper of the Forest.

CBG: Lord Malmsbury.

REM: Lord Malmsbury and Lady Malmsbury came over several times. Lord Shaftesbury whose family was directly related to the settlement in Charleston and the early history, he came on numerous occasions and was here for about everything that happened. We had the Royal Green Jackets who had a very direct history with what happened over here. We visited their headquarters over in England, and, lo and behold, the week we were there and were scheduled to visit with them and watch them in their very historic parade ceremonies was when the Irish conflict broke out, and they had to be rushed off to Ireland where they still are. But we had several former commanders of the Royal Green Jackets. So the British government was very cooperative in sending people and arranging for people to come. The Queen Mother had us in her home for lunch the day the Parliament opened and we were able to view from her vantage point the historic parade. It was right interesting because Princess Margaret, then so much in the news, just showed up at lunch to speak and to visit, and she was very receptive to an invitation to come over and visit. However, she got embroiled in all of her family and divorce problems and didn't work it out.

CBG: What was the time like that you spent in England?

REM: It was like everything else that we did, jam-packed and filled with a very, very tight schedule. Naturally, we toured a lot of the historic places there and got a lot of publicity for the state. We were either guest at 1uncheons, or we hosted functions. One of the major functions we had was an evening dinner in which we had all of the prominent London people, including a lot of the industrial people who had investments over

here. By coincidence, I remember the star of the show that evening turned out to be Mendel Rivers. Mendel just happened to be in London staying at the hotel, and we ran into him and were able to get him to come in and be there. But we visited and hosted and talked and got a lot of activity because we were trying to promote, you know, the British coming over during that period of time. From a tourist point of view I think we were fairly successful.

CBG: Would you say in general that the Tricentennial Commission met your expectations?

REM: Yes. I think it exceeded my expectations because I was a skeptic about it and naturally conservative about those kinds of things and was concerned that it might be getting too big. Maybe there were too many people who had too many ideas about it. I had to admit that it far exceeded my expectations because it really did what you would hope it would do. You still have to say we had our bad times with the Greenville dome and the fact that the Hampton-Preston House didn't work out like we wanted. But it's significant to have it and to have it restored as a part of the Historic Columbia Foundation where it should have been.

CBG: And the general idea was to show that South Carolina had a history before 1865.

REM: Well, that's what we wanted, to show South Carolina at its best, when it was a real leader as it was in the early days, and to lift people's vision was what it was all about, to try to lift their vision and get us thinking a little ahead and talking about restoring South Carolina to a position of prestige and leadership that it had occupied in its early days, in its early history and sort of putting the Civil War--though it's a very important part of the history of the state--behind us

and sort of putting the focus on better times and better things, things that pulled us together rather than things that seemed to divide us.

END OF SIDE ONE

SIDE TWO

CBG: This is Tape 20, Side 2, an interview with Governor Robert E. McNair as a part of the McNair Oral History Project of the South Carolina Department of Archives and History. Today's date is April 11, 1983. Governor, we were talking generally about the impact of the Tricentennial Commission on a positive consciousness of the history of the state. What was your relationship with historic preservation?

REM: I think it had a very positive influence. Charleston was always involved, but it accelerated there. There were places like Abbeville, which had the historical theatre that had just about deteriorated. They restored it and refurbished it and really started having performances again. Camden restored and developed the historic park over there, and all around, really, wherever you would go, you would see renovation going on and people fixing up historic monuments and buildings and things of that nature. So, yes, it had a very significant impact, again, because that's where our real history was, in the Revolutionary period, as I've said.

You know, we discovered that more battles were fought on South Carolina soil than anywhere else, and I think we refought them all (chuckles) during that period. I used to say to John May, who was Colonel May and was in the legislature when we did the Civil War Centennial--my only instructions to him were, "John, let's only refight the battles we won. Let's don't talk about those we lost." Well, in the Revolutionary period we had Francis Marion who had real sex appeal to

people. I may have mentioned that my thoughts were triggered by the Continental Insurance Company, surprisingly, when they were doing a series on the Revolutionary period. They discovered, I think to their surprise, that New Jersey had a big history and all the New England area had a history, but the war was really won down here. So they wanted to film the third in their series, entitled *The Victory*, and came down with a history professor from one of the New England schools and did that here in South Carolina. By coincidence I happened to have gotten involved simply because I had represented Continental in a couple of law suits and the general counsel called me. So I got involved, and that got me to really thinking more and more about all that really happened in South Carolina.

CBG: Sometimes historic preservation or redeveloping a sense of history is criticized, for example, for bringing up bad memories of the past among specific groups like embarrassing immigration or poverty or conditions of slavery, or even when property is being redeveloped it may mean that the hard working owner is dispossessed by this new crowd that has the money to fix it up in a particular way. Did you run into any of that negativism?

REM: We ran into some, yes, and we ran into considerable discussion about what it was costing. There were a lot of people who felt that it was a big waste of money. A lot of this could have been better spent on other things, they said. I'm not sure there was waste. I think there certainly were instances where things didn't turn out as well as people had hoped they would. So many of the historic facilities, houses, and other places were in what were underdeveloped, slum areas. There was some concern about that, about spending all the money in just restoring an old building when there was so much need around. I think you always

run into that, and our attitude was that this had a good effect, too, because it might develop a little more pride on the part of people who owned property in those areas and cause them to fix up and spruce up and do something that they hadn't been willing to do before. But we did have it. The commission itself, I think everybody recalls, was controversial. It was controversial in that it had such a big plan, and then it got into controversy within the plan because there was tugging for this and somebody wanting special projects. There was a constant controversy about what would be done, what the state would do but the main focus was to try to get other people to do things, to get the counties and cities and rural areas to take on most of it and that happened.

CBG: What about historic records, the development and maintenance of a records management system for the state?

REM: Well, that is part of the influence of Charles Lee and those who had long been concerned about the lack of preservation of records, maintenance of records and safekeeping of records. I suppose this period was where that program, records management, really came into being with the growth of Archives into Archives and History and getting it involved in more records management and recordkeeping. We had nothing like that before and no control over records. So many of them were stored in warehouses, and nobody knew they were there. Nobody did any cataloging and indexing of anything other than the universities and so I think this focus on history certainly was an impetus to get into all of that.

I need to come back to people who were surprising by their interest in all of these kinds of things, like [Patrick C.] Pat Smith, who was the state auditor, budget director. Pat, you know, was the fellow with the sharp pencil, very conservative, that everybody thought you couldn't squeeze a penny out of. Pat Smith was a strong supporter of this kind of

thing because he recognized its importance to South Carolina. He was a big supporter of the Tricentennial and really was probably more influential in getting the funding and being able to do a lot of the things than anybody else because people respected him. If Pat put his approval on something, they thought it had been thought through pretty well and met the financial guidelines that were being set up.

CBG: Was there a parallel emphasis on, let's say, the arts generally?

REM: Yes, and again I don't know what triggered it, but it was part of the whole emphasis on all of these kinds of things for the first time. The federal government stimulated a lot of it with their funds and with their special grant money to give you the resources to create committees and commissions to do planning, and through that, then you'd encourage the local areas to get more involved. I think part of this was to reach out and to have a broad touch on South Carolina, not just on historic buildings, but, as we say, with emphasis on the whole environment of living in the state. Up until then, you know, if you didn't go to the Dock Street Theatre in Charleston, there wasn't much else to do. The Town Theatre was here. Greenville had built and had its program. But you know, places like Florence came up with a little theatre and something for the performing arts. We mentioned Abbeville. Everybody got into some kind of historic drama or historic preservation of some kind, and I think that in itself stimulated it, had some influence that hopefully was carried on.

CBG: Was the purpose of the State Arts Commission to help support projects like these with federal funds or with technical assistance?

REM: Yes. And I suppose that was our first venture, like PRT was our first venture at a statewide planned effort. Myrtle Beach and Charleston had good programs on tourism. Charleston had good programs in the arts,

the performing arts and all of that, but for the state as a whole, unless there was a college or university in a town, there wasn't anything much going on. So the Arts Commission, yes, that was the purpose, to try to stimulate interest, to help in the planning and really to help form local groups and local committees and local commissions that would get interested and develop programs.

CBG: With a broad brush now, we've talked about the development of a Capitol Complex, a statewide television system, a planned approach to celebrating the state's 300th anniversary and the development of records management, archives systems, and the arts. How would you assess the changes in South Carolina culture during your administration?

REM: Well, I think just the attitude change, you know, was important to us to develop culturally as well as educationally and industrially. It all had to be a very important part of the total development of South Carolina. I suppose that would be the main impact, a recognition that this is important, this is something worthwhile. Though you don't spend as much money, it's just as important to the state and it's future as industrial development and as educational improvement. It all fits together to build a better environment to live in and to grow. If we were going to bring people to South Carolina, you've got to do this.

One of the big things we ran into, particularly in bringing the top management-level people to South Carolina, is, "What is there for my family to do? I know it's a good place to invest. I know you've got good labor. I know you've got good beaches, but we're accustomed to the cultural things. What do we do in Orangeburg in the evenings? Particularly what do we do in Allendale, in Bamberg, in Kingstree, and places like that?" We felt it was important to begin to try to get more community interest in things beyond just that day-to-day type of

activity. Take Allendale, for instance, a quiet little, agricultural community with Route 301 going through, which really revitalized it. During this period it reached back to some of the significant early history of that area and got interested in doing things. It really even had an influence on the Aikens and the Camdens as well as on the Lancasters and the Conways and places like that.

CBG: It may be a truism, but I think what you're hinting at is that just in terms of the technical requirements of industry and relocation, unless there's a specialized industry need, everybody ranks fairly equally.

REM: Yes.

CBG: So this idea of improving the quality of life or the complex of cultural and recreational as well as educational opportunities often, at least in the minds of management, is an important part of an industry location decision.

REM: Yes.

CBG: So in that sense, you could really think of this as an investment in the future of the state that may make the difference for industry, and even so, it's not a loss because the natives can certainly enjoy it, too.

REM: You've said it very well.

CBG: It would be a . . .

REM: Yes, you've said well, really, because it really was to improve the quality of life and to put us in a better competitive position with others as we went about it. We had begun to focus on the next level of industrial development, on technology and on the regional office centers for people and getting people from the management level coming in. All one had to do was go to Greenville or Spartanburg and see what was going on there. A lot of it was the influence of these people that had come

in. They'd been accustomed to this where they were, and they came in and supported the communities and their further development. Spartanburg was a good example because it had always been probably culturally one of the most advanced areas. It had Converse, a really recognized girl's school centered around the performing arts. They could go and see anything there. Wofford had always been recognized as an extremely high academic school, and yet it had all the things because Spartanburg supported it. In Greenville you can look at Furman University and see what support does for an institution. There was a Baptist school. It was in downtown Greenville in dilapidated buildings and was fighting for survival. The Greenville community recognized how important a real quality institution with a national image would mean to them, and they supported it. It went out with its new campus and all and really became a real, I think, cultural influence on Greenville as well as a good educational institution.

CBG: If you look back over this area, is there anything that you would do differently or that you wouldn't have done or that you would have done if you could have?

REM: Everybody says hindsight is 20-20. Maybe I ought to put a story I heard about [Paul] Bear Bryant on the record. In that period of time you were making so many decisions and really making them on the best information available to you. Then, you know, a week or two later you'd be somewhere, and one of your good friends, your supporters, would sneak up--he didn't want anybody to know he'd been a big friend and supporter because of something you'd done--and say, "If I'd been you, I don't think I would have done so-and-so. I would have made such-and-such a decision on such-and-such an issue." I'd always look at him and say, "Well, maybe I wouldn't either today, but, you know, I had to make mine before I knew

all that you know and before the press got through telling me what should have been done."

I tell the story about Bear Bryant when he lost that famous Orange Bowl game with Joe Namath as his quarterback. I recall the last seconds of the game, fourth down--and Namath had bad knees and all. I don't recall what he did, whether he called a Namath sneak with bad knees and all, but it didn't work, and they lost, which was unusual for them, against Nebraska.

Two weeks 1ater, Dr. Frank Rose, who was then president of the University of Alabama, was in a hotel in Miami, and he walked right into Bear Bryant. He said, "My God, Bear, what are you doing here?" He said, "Well, I went over to the islands for two weeks, and I'm just coming back. I just couldn't face those people from Alabama and I decided I'd wait until it cooled off before I saw anybody and went home." And with that Dr. Frank said, "Well, Bear, you know, I wouldn't have gone back either. I've been down here thinking myself for the last couple of weeks, and I just don't believe, if I'd been you, I would have called that last play." Bear said, "Well, Dr. Frank, if I'd had two weeks to think about the damn play, I wouldn't have called it either."

CBG: (chuckles)

REM: So, yes, your hindsight.

CBG: Right, sure.

REM: But people always ask me this and I say perhaps there are things that you would have done differently. Maybe there are decisions you would have made differently with twelve years of reflection, but by and large, I really don't. Overall, I think that's one of the reasons that perhaps I don't have that thing under my skin to get back again. There's not a whole lot out there that I see I'd get excited about, and I think

it was an exciting period. It was a good period, it was a challenging period and I haven't found any new challenges (laughter) I'd like to take on that would be better or more exciting than during that period of time.

END OF TAPE